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ABSTRACT

This report reviews existing research on the labor force participation and employment of Southeast Asian refugees, in the context of an apparent paradox between reports of positive labor force participation and high rates of public assistance usage by refugees. Following an introduction, Part II reviews the available evidence on general labor force activities of Southeast Asian refugees as compared with the general U.S. population. Part III focuses on factors which seem most influential in predicting who enters the labor force, including age, sex, foreign education, knowledge of English upon arrival, and timing of arrival in the United States. Parts IV and V consider whether the type of sponsorship which a refugee is assisted influences labor force activity, and analyse refugee ethnic differences and how they affect labor force participation. Section VI examines the methods used by refugees to search for and secure jobs. Section VII describes what kinds of jobs they find and what job conditions are like for them, and also comments on their involvement in the "underground economy." It is concluded that the high rate of welfare participation does not appear to be a result of lack of motivation to work, but rather of the refugees' difficulty in obtaining adequately remunerative work. (CG)

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LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION AND EMPLOYMENT

OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN REFUGEES IN THE UNITED STATES

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction.....1

II. Aggregate Patterns of Labor Force Activity.....4

III. Determinants of Labor Force Participation.....8

A. A General Model.....10

B. Age and Education.....29

C. Gender.....31

D. Time in the U.S.....33

E. English Language Proficiency.....46

F. Geography.....51

IV. Sponsorship and Employment.....54

V. Ethnicity and Employment.....60

VI. Methods of Job Search.....67

VII. Jobs.....75

A. General Patterns.....75

B. An Example of Job Conditions.....79

VI. Concluding Remarks.....87

Bibliography

Appendix

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Labor Force Participation and Employment by Sex: All Individuals 16 Years of Age or Over, 1981-1983.....9

Table 2 Summary Statistics.....17

Table 3 Selected Predictors of Labor Force Participation, Southeast Asian Refugees, 16 Years of Age or Over, 1983.....20

Table 4 Labor Force Participation and Employment by Year of Entry: All Individuals 16 Years of Age or Over, 1983.....35

Table 5 Labor Force Participation Rates and Unemployment, Yearly Cohorts of Southeast Asian Refugees.....41

Table 6 Labor Force Participation of Southeast Asian Refugees by Type of Sponsorship and Social Backgrounds, 1983.....57

Table 7 Labor Force Participation of Southeast Asian Refugees by Ethnicity and Social Backgrounds, 1983.....64

Table 8 Sources of Job Information.....70

Table 9 Job Search Methods among the Currently Unemployed....74

Table 10 Reasons for Not Seeking a Job.....76

Table 11 Sector of Employment: All Employed Individuals 16 Years of Age or Over, 1983.....78

Table 12 Current Occupation: All Employed Individuals 16 Years of Age or Over, 1983.....80

Table 13 Most Frequent Current Occupations: All Individuals Currently Employed, 1983.....82

I. Introduction

Self-sufficient, long-term employment is the primary goal of refugee resettlement. Until recently, however, there has been inadequate research on refugees' experiences in the labor market and their employment problems. Widespread faith in the assumption that refugees will find adequate jobs in the U.S. labor market has been encouraged by limited scientific evidence that shows the longer an immigrant lives in the United States the better his or her economic position. Such an optimistic observation, however, has led to a disturbing paradox. On the one hand, reports indicate that refugees are doing well in the labor market, progressing with each year toward an acceptable level of labor force activity. On the other hand, refugees' use of public assistance remains relatively high, even after several years in the United States. How do we explain these apparently contradictory tendencies?

Concern over the rate of public assistance utilization easily characterizes the problem -- and therefore the refugees themselves -- as a "dependency" or public assistance problem. Viewing resettlement as a dependency problem, however, leads to distortions in perspective. Discussions of resettlement take as their starting point the question of how to reduce assistance, and proceed from there to devise incentives and solutions as if such actions were independent of employment conditions faced by both refugees and native-born workers. Proposals for renewed "private-sector" initiative understate the predominant role which the private sector has always played in refugee

resettlement. And, the increased incidence with which formerly resettled refugees have become the sponsors of new arrivals is charged with predisposing refugees to a "dependency" orientation.

Although there is undoubtedly a link between public assistance and labor force activity, discussions of this issue for refugees have often neglected the labor market and employment experiences of the new arrivals. A review of the available literature on refugees' labor market experiences reveals that the problems of refugee self-sufficiency are, at least in large part, employment problems. Refugees face difficulties because of several factors, including those clearly related to their immigration status, their background training, the conditions of the local economies where they are resettled, and the character of the resettlement program. Many of their experiences are not all that different from the employment problems facing U.S. workers.

The purpose of this report is to review existing research on the labor force participation and employment of Southeast Asian refugees. My goal is to outline the general patterns of labor market activity, those upon which most authors seem to agree, as well as to document the sources of significant variation among the refugees themselves. The issues I have chosen to pursue derive from two sources, those raised by existing empirical studies of refugee employment, and those that originate in the evaluations and statements of policy-makers. Although consensus of opinion and evidence can be reached on the importance of certain factors that influence refugees' economic statuses, many of the issues remain unresolved.

This report is organized into six analytical sections. Part II reviews the available evidence on the general labor force activities of Southeast Asian refugees as they compare with the U.S. population. The focus of Part III is on which factors appear most influential in predicting who enters the labor force. A series of subsections include discussions of each of the following significant factors; age, sex, foreign education, knowledge of English and the timing of arrival in the United States. I also present in this section a new analysis of labor force participation using data from the only nationally representative survey of Southeast Asian refugees.

The following two sections highlight two special features of this refugee population and program. The first involves the debate over whether the type of sponsorship through which a refugee is assisted influences his or her labor force activity. This is followed by an analysis of ethnic differentials in labor market behavior. In both sections, the statistical analysis is based on the national survey. Finally, Section VI and VII examine the methods used by refugees to search for and find jobs, and the types of employment which they secure. In addition to documenting their broad sectoral and occupational locations, this final analytical section comments on recent reports concerning the involvement of Southeast Asian refugees in the "underground economy".

There is a substantial amount of material available on refugee resettlement to be gleaned for information on refugee employment. Not all can be reproduced in a report such as this. Rather, this review presents selected features of that literature. It also seeks to

contribute to the literature through a presentation of new analyses drawn from the Annual Survey of Refugees conducted in 1983. This annual survey is the only nationally representative data source available at the present time. As a result, I have used it extensively to present the general trends in labor force participation and employment. As each of the other studies has either a restricted sampling frame or more narrow focus, I have used them to identify variations in the general patterns and to highlight differences or commonalities in interpretations of the status and progress of refugees in the U.S. labor market. By its nature, this report does not make claims of being an exhaustive review of the issues involved in refugees' movement toward self-sufficiency.

II. Aggregate Patterns of Labor Force Activity

The measure of work-related activity used most widely by U.S. reporting systems such as the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Bureau of the Census is the labor force participation rate. It measures whether a person is employed or actively seeking a job during a specified period (typically a week or month before the survey date). A labor force participant is someone who is either employed or actively seeking work. A non-participant, or someone who is outside the labor force, is neither working nor is actively seeking a job. The concept of labor force participation is designed to capture the current labor supply, or that proportion of the working age population that is engaged in work or is available to be employed.

As a measure of current labor supply, the labor force participation rate accurately reflects conditions at any specific

time. The concept obscures, however, several aspects of social behavior that influence the magnitude of the rate and are of particular significance in gauging the economic status of a group. The most significant omission involves the number of discouraged workers; that is, persons who have sought employment in the past but no longer actively search because of their inability to secure a job. The concept also lumps together very different reasons for not looking for work. One consequence is the tendency to misinterpret the reasons for a group's low labor force participation.

Actively seeking work, as part of a measure of participation, is both an attitude and a behavior. Too often, however, it is interpreted solely as an attitude: the person outside the labor force does not want or need to work. When this kind of interpretation is applied to refugees, who as I have suggested previously are often seen possessed of a "dependency" problem, the relatively large numbers of people who are not actively seeking work (in the labor force) are seen as lacking the mentality to work. And this mentality is then interpreted as a "welfare mentality".

Another useful measure of labor market activity is the employment population ratio. Although this too suffers from some of the above conceptual problems, it does not rely on the distinction between those who are currently seeking work, but unable to find it, and those who are not actively looking for a job. The employment population ratio simply measures the ratio of persons who currently hold a job to the entire population of working age. This measure represents, in a sense, how many workers there are to support a particular group.

In this section of the report, both measures are used to review existing evidence on the work-related activities of the Southeast Asian population. In addition, an attempt is made to compare these measures for the refugee population and the total U.S. population.

The latest national figures on the employment status of the Southeast Asian refugee population are for October, 1983. As a group, Southeast Asian refugees are less likely than the general U.S. working aged population to be either employed or looking for a job. The labor force participation rate for these refugees was 55.0 percent in October, compared to 64.1 percent of the U.S. working age population. Refugees also had a substantially higher level of unemployment: in October, 18.0 percent of the refugees were looking for work but were unable to find it. The comparable U.S. rate was 8.2 percent.

The refugees' progress in finding and retaining employment has been strongly influenced in the past few years by the general conditions of the U.S. economy. Refugees have actively participated in the labor force at approximately the same overall rate for the last three years, and in doing so have followed a similar, stable pattern among the U.S. labor force. Like their native-born counterparts, however, refugees have suffered from the 1982 recession. Unemployment in October of each of the last three years for U.S. workers was 7.5 percent, 9.9 percent, and 8.2 percent, respectively. During the same period, refugees faced similar employment difficulties, although the magnitude of their problems was much greater: their unemployment rates were 15.5 in 1981, 24.1 percent in 1982, and 18.0 percent in 1983.

Previous studies, however, have suggested that such comparisons are biased, typically understating the gap between the refugee and total U.S. populations. The reason for the bias is that the refugee population has a much greater proportion of younger men than does the U.S. population. A more refined and less biased comparison disaggregates each population according to gender and age. But among similar age and gender groups, Southeast Asian refugees still have consistently lower levels of labor market activity than the total U.S. population, regardless of which measure of that activity is used.

For example, David North reports that in 1978 male refugees had almost a four percentage point lower labor force participation rate than men in the total U.S. population. Refugee women, however, held a slightly greater participation rate. His data on the refugee workforce was derived from the series of telephone surveys conducted during the first several years of the resettlement program, the predecessors of the Annual Survey of Refugees used extensively in this report. There is reason to believe that these earlier surveys selected refugees who were perhaps better off economically. The refugee data, therefore, would overestimate the degree of labor force participation. In addition, the 1978 figures would refer predominantly to the cohort of 1975 arrivals, who by all accounts are better educated and prepared for participation in the U.S. economy. These are possible reasons why the figures discussed below show such a comparatively much larger difference between the refugee and U.S. populations.

Table 1 shows the comparison of the labor force participation

rates and employment population ratios of the Southeast Asian refugee and U.S. populations in 1981, 1982, and 1983, for men and women. In virtually all cases, the difference between the two groups is well over 10 percentage points, or twenty to twenty-five percent lower than the U.S. level. As with the earlier figures discussed by North, refugee women fared better in both their labor force and employment rates. Nevertheless, the size of the differences between the groups, and the consistency in the pattern, is noteworthy. The differential age composition of the two populations accounts for some of the gap between the two populations, but in none of the cases does it eliminate the sizeable difference.

In sum, these aggregate, national figures show that refugees face general problems in the U.S. labor market. Compared to the general U.S. population, Southeast Asian refugees as a group participate less frequently in the labor market, they suffer higher unemployment rates, and they have endured harsher penalties from the recent recession. Of course, there may be many reasons for this relative labor market status. The following section reviews several of the most likely possibilities.

III. Determinants of Labor Force Participation

The purpose of this section is to identify and discuss the primary factors that influence labor force participation. The discussion begins with a general model of labor force participation based on the national refugee population. The data presented are derived from the 1983 Annual Survey of Refugees. Following this, several of the most important determinants are examined in some

Table 1: Labor Force Participation and Employment by Sex: All Individuals 16 years of Age or Over, 1981-1983

Labor Market Activity	Southeast Asian Refugees* (1)	U.S. Population** (2)	Difference (1)-(2)
Labor Force Participation			
October, 1981			
Men	59.7	76.5	-16.8
Women	40.3	52.7	-12.4
October, 1982			
Men	64.7	76.3	-11.6
Women	45.3	53.1	- 7.8
October, 1983			
Men	58.7	76.0	-17.3
Women	41.3	53.4	-12.1
Employment Population Ratio			
October, 1981			
Men	50.5	70.5	-20.0
Women	34.0	48.3	-14.3
October, 1982			
Men	48.4	61.2	-12.8
Women	35.0	42.6	- 7.6
October, 1983			
Men	48.0	69.7	-21.7
Women	32.8	48.9	-16.1

*Source: Annual Survey of Refugees.
**Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment and Earnings, Vol. 29, No. 11, November, 1982, Tables A-3 and A-4, pp. 8-11; and Vol. 30, No. 11, November, 1983, Table A-3, p. 10.

detail. The aim is both to document the most pervasive influences and to explore the complexities that inevitably frustrate any attempt to characterize the behavior of such a large group.

A. A General Model

A relatively long list of factors that influence refugee employment could be compiled from previous studies, but the relative importance of each or the extent of their applicability to the general refugee population is nearly impossible to assess reliably. In addition to fundamental differences in sample design among the studies reviewed, there are at least two additional, methodological reasons for this inability to summarize the patterns for the total refugee population. First, some factors are clearly related to only local conditions, whether because of the regional labor market or characteristics of the refugee groups resettled in the area. For example, automobile ownership is an important predictor of labor force participation and employment in at least three independent studies, including Aames et al., the Social Science Research Laboratory's study of San Diego, and the Church World Service research project. Except in the latter case, however, the evidence points to only a regionally specific effect of car ownership. Auto transportation appears to be a special problem for refugees living in Southern California, where the distances traveled to work are greater and travel by car the predominant means of getting to work. Aames et al. found that there was even a difference in the importance of car ownership between Northern and Southern California.

Second, there is often considerable ambiguity in the causal

relationships assumed in many refugee employment studies. Although this conceptual difficulty will reappear throughout the issues discussed in this report, an example here will alert the reader to the problem. Most research on refugee employment is cross-sectional, observing the behavior and status of refugees at only one point in time. In all such studies, the inability to establish temporal sequence between two or more experiences severely weakens the causal direction the analyst seeks to establish.

Automobile ownership again provides a useful illustration. Does private access to a car provide a means for which a refugee gets out of his or her home to look for employment; or, does previous employment generate the income that allows the refugee to purchase a car? Undoubtedly both sequences are not only conceivable but highly probable. Car ownership is such an essential tool of American culture that early acquisition is a desirable step in effective resettlement. Examples abound in which sponsors have pooled local resources to acquire a car for the refugee family they were assisting. But this is hardly the pervasive rule, and certainly many refugees move quickly after securing a job to buy a car. In this case, it is certainly erroneous inference, and clearly an unwise foundation for program design, to stress the importance of car ownership as a prerequisite or facilitator of employment and self-sufficient resettlement. The repeated significance of this variable in certain localized surveys should merely encourage local service providers and sponsors to review the refugees' means of transportation to work to determine whether a problem exists.

The present attempt, therefore, to identify a set of variables which measure the primary predictors of labor force participation draws on the only survey that covers the entire population and covers sufficient retrospective data to introduce a temporal sequence into the analysis, the Annual Survey of Refugees. The variables used in this analysis were selected as the set most frequently cited by previous research as having a significant influence on labor force participation or employment. Theoretical concerns were also important. In any analysis of refugees' labor force participation there is a clear expectation that background variables should outweigh the influences of experiences in the United States. The reason is simple: in most of the surveys, refugees have had only two or three years of residence or work experience in the United States. Indeed, in this short period it would be quite remarkable if their experiences in the United States had already begun to contribute to different economic outcomes within the refugee population. Rather, the expectation should be that background differentials, as measured by former occupation, education, English training, class background, etc., should continue to have a major effect on economic progress in these early years.

In contrast, Paul Strand has argued that unemployment is largely influenced by factors situated in the United States. He correctly emphasizes the differences between labor force participation and unemployment. However, most of the factors that he finds strongly related to unemployment are themselves heavily affected by background experiences. English proficiency and attendance in English classroom

training, for example, which he finds represent the strongest predictors of unemployment, are both directly determined by the refugees' former levels of education and prior knowledge of English.

Overall, there is a general consensus on a few basic determinants of labor force participation or employment in the United States. These include time in the United States, former education in the home country, age, sex, and English knowledge acquired before entry. Other factors which are identified by only a few studies include household size or composition, automobile ownership, secondary migration, and residence in California. The consensus may be summarized as follows: "Those who are not involved in the labor force at any particular time have been in the United States the shortest period, they are the oldest, and least literate, they have the least formal education and the largest households." (Pullen and Ryan, 1982/3: 14)

Analysis of the Annual Survey of Refugees serves to test the significance and reveal the magnitude of each of these generally agreed upon determinants of labor force participation. The survey represents the entire Southeast Asian refugee population as of April 1, 1983, and contains extensive information on both the refugees' backgrounds and their experiences in the United States. The analytical strategy employed here is to examine the relative influence of each of the common factors mentioned above. Rather then presenting a series of crosstabulations to show the relationship between each of the above variables and labor force participation, I have estimated a multivariate regression model using participation as the dependent variable (participate = 1; not participate = 0). For readers familiar

with regression analysis, the form of presentation throughout the report should prove relatively straightforward and commonplace. For those who are not as familiar with this technique, a brief description of the strategy may be useful.

Many studies of refugee employment argue on the basis of the crosstabulation of employment characteristics and one or two variables of interest. Tables of labor force participation for each yearly cohort of arrivals, for men and women, and for levels of English proficiency are now familiar items of evidence concerning the important factors in promoting or inhibiting refugees' self-sufficiency. Although this style of analysis is extremely valuable, which of course is why most researchers choose to present their initial results in this form, repeated use tends to promote and reinforce uncritical, oversimplified interpretations of which factors are the most important for refugees' employment. Obviously, to the extent that policy or program decisions are influenced by such analyses, judgements may be based more on personal biases in selecting the one or two variables that seem important than on the strength of more supportable analytical inferences.

For example, every study that I have reviewed can show a positive and apparently strong relationship between English language proficiency and labor force participation or employment. Use of English is such a widespread crucial concern that this relationship is easily used as support for sweeping declarations about how important language utilization is for refugee employment. The simple relationships may even be used to justify programmatic goals:

increase English proficiency and refugees' employment levels will improve.

Without debating the substantive claims at this point, however, the problem is that English proficiency is related to many other characteristics of the refugees and their resettlement experiences. The most important is the very strong relationship between a refugee's education or former work with American personnel in his or her home country and knowledge and proficiency with English. In order to understand whether English language is the specific tool that allows refugees to find employment, it is desirable to distinguish as best as possible between the predictive importance of previous education or exposure to American personnel and English proficiency.

To accomplish this, the analysis quickly becomes too complex for easy presentation using a cross-tabular format. For instance, not only are refugees with higher education more likely to speak English, but men are more proficient than women, those who left Saigon in 1975 have a greater working knowledge than later arrivals, and younger adults know more of the language than their elders. The tables would be overwhelmingly complex if they were to show the labor force participation of groups at each respective level of age, sex, education, knowledge of English, etc., <u>simultaneously.</u> With such analytical intentions, however, multiple regression becomes a technique that allows the analyst to examine each possible factor relative to all of the others in the equation. Following the example here, for instance, the analytical steps followed below will show whether English proficiency is an important predictor of labor force

participation among refugees that have the same age, sex, and educational levels, and how strong a predictor of employment it is after taking into account its relationship to these other characteristics. If English language proficiency remains a significant predictor of participation after controlling for, or independent of, the other characteristics, the interpretation of its utility in promoting employment is considerably strengthened.

Table 2 presents summary statistics for the variables used in this regression analysis. These figures show the average value of each variable for the total refugee population and for men and women separately. All the variables are scaled from lowest to highest. Dichotomous variables are coded so that membership in the group is one and nonmembership is zero.

The labor force participation rate for the total refugee population is 51 percent, but as expected from the previous discussions, this is greatly influenced by a substantial proportion of young men in the group. Well over one-third (37 percent) of the population is between the ages of 16 and 24, and a majority of the group are men (53 percent). These figures for the total population also obscure considerable gender differences. Men participate at a rate 16 percentage points above women: 58 percent for men compared to 42 percent for women. Men also have an apparent advantage over women in terms of the number of years of education prior to arriving in the United States. On average, men had completed two years of schooling more than their female counterparts before they left Southeast Asia. This advantage is reflected in the men's slight advantage in English

Table 2: Summary Statistics

Variable	Mean		
	Total	Men	Women
Labor Force Participation	.51	.58	.42
16-24 years of age	.37	.39	.35
Over 55 years of age	.08	.08	.09
Sex (male)	.53	---	---
Foreign Education (years)	7.14	8.00	6.12
English Proficiency at Arrival in U.S.	1.60	1.70	1.50
Household Size (persons)	6.30	6.20	6.40
Residence in California	.37	.36	.38
English Improvement	.91	.80	1.04
Years in U.S.	3.90	3.90	3.90

Source: Annual Survey of Refugees, 1983

proficiency upon arrival. The English proficiency variable used here is a four category, self-evaluation of how well the refugee speaks or understands English. On average, the total refugee population ranked themselves in the lowest two categories, "not at all" and "somewhat". The analysis was repeated using a similar measure of the refugees' proficiency in writing and reading English. The results were virtually the same.

At the time of the survey, the total refugee population had an average of almost four years of residence in the United States. There were no differences between men and women in their year of arrival. They also shared similar sized households (6 persons) and virtually the same likelihood of having resettled in California (37 percent).

In terms of their experiences in the United States, men and women differ the most in their amount of improvement in speaking and understanding English. The English improvement variable was constructed by subtracting the refugee's proficiency score upon arrival from the same score reported at the time of the interview. On average, after nearly four years of residence in the United States, the refugees had improved their English proficiency by one category. From a clear majority who rated their English as non-existent upon arrival, the largest proportion evaluated their current language use between "somewhat" and "well". Interestingly, women reported greater improvements than men. This may be due, in part, to the women's lower average levels when they arrived. A larger proportion of men than women spoke English fluently upon arrival. As "fluent" represented the highest category of proficiency, the relatively unrefined scale

used here prevented these men from recording improvement over the years. This would attenuate the average improvement for the entire group. The improvement by women, however, offers the possibility of demonstrating whether English proficiency is a significant influence on labor force participation.

Table 3 presents the results of the regression of labor force participation on the nine variables of general importance to the refugee population. Each figure or coefficient represents the probability of participating in the labor market for each unit increase in the predictor. For example, the coefficient for Foreign Education (b=.03) may be interpreted as follows: each year of additional schooling in the refugees' home country raises the probability of that person participating in the labor force in the United States by three percentage points.

The large number of figures in the table looks more imposing than is the case. Three sets of results are shown, those for the total working age population, and for men and women separately. The rationale for splitting the results based on gender will become clear from the first set of figures on the total population. Within each of these three sets, results are presented for equations that exclude the variable "Years in the United States" (column one in each set), and that include the same variable (column two in each set). The reason for this strategy is simply to demonstrate more clearly the impact of considering the timing of arrival in the United States.

The first two columns show the magnitude of the relationship of each of these variables on labor force participation controlling for

Table 3: Selected Predictors of Labor Force Participation, Southeast Asian Refugees, 16 Years of Age or Over, 1983

Variables	Labor Force Participation					
	Total		Men		Women	
	b (S.E.b)		b (S.E.b)		b (S.E.b)	
	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)
Intercept	.42	.42	.62	.62	.33	.33
16-24 years of age	-.23 (.02)	-.22 (.02)	-.30 (.02)	-.28 (.02)	-.16 (.02)	-.15 (.02)
Over 55 years of age	-.24 (.03)	-.25 (.03)	-.28 (.04)	-.29 (.04)	-.21 (.04)	-.23 (.04)
Sex	.10 (.02)	.10 (.02)	--	--	--	--
Foreign Education	.03 (.002)	.03 (.002)	.02 (.003)	.02 (.003)	.03 (.003)	.02 (.003)
English proficiency at arrival	.07 (.01)	.02* (.02)	.05 (.02)	.01* (.02)	.09 (.02)	.04** (.02)
Household Size	-.02 (.003)	-.02 (.002)	-.02 (.004)	-.02 (.004)	-.02 (.005)	-.02 (.005)
Residence in California	-.18 (.02)	-.18 (.01)	-.21 (.02)	-.21 (.02)	-.15 (.02)	-.14 (.02)
English Improvement	.007* (.009)	-.03 (.01)	-.003* (.01)	-.03 (.01)	.03 (.01)	-.01* (.01)
Years in the U.S.		.03 (.003)		.03 (.004)		.04 (.005)
R^2	.26	.27	.29	.30	.19	.21

Source: Annual Survey of Refugees, 1983

* Not statistically significant at .05

** Significant at .10

(or "net of") other characteristics included in the equation. Figures in column one show that seven out of the eight variables are significant predictors of labor force participation. Both the youngest and oldest adults in this group are much less likely to participate in the labor force than adults in the prime working ages, even when they have similar educational and english language skills. In both cases, the probability of participation is 25 percentage points below those adults aged 25 to 54 years old. These significant differences, however, are clearly similar to the relationship between age and employment in the total U.S. population. In general, participation rates are low among young adults, who are frequently engaged in alternative activities such as education and training, and rise through the middle years to begin a descent in the late 40s and early 50s. These figures suggest that, although the absolute magnitude of lower participation rates is large, refugees' work activities follow the familiar pattern for all workers in the U.S. labor market.

Figures in column one also show that women are at a significant disadvantage compared to men, even though their clear differences in background training have been taken into account. Women who have the same age, education, level of English proficiency, household size, and place of residence as their male counterparts still have a 10 percentage point lower probability of labor force participation. On average, women are at a 16 point disadvantage (Table 2: average rates are .58 for men compared with .42 for women). When differences in background status and training, as well as selected experiences in the

United States, are taken into account, the gap between men and women declines by six points, or by about a third. The remaining significant difference, however, can not be explained by these consensually-selected determinants of labor force participation. Other factors, as yet undocumented, remain to account for this gender gap.

Foreign education and English proficiency are both positive predictors of labor force participation. Foreign educational background, however, has by far the strongest influence on the probability of participation than any variable considered in these equations. Each additional year of education before arrival, for example, gives the more educated a 3 percentage point advantage over the lesser trained. Foreign education, of course, is not amenable to programmatic intervention. Instead, it suggests that those who had the social and economic standing in their home countries to gain access to higher levels of education are in a much better position to enter the labor market successfully after arriving in the United States.

The two variables that measure circumstances in the United States, household size and residence in California, are both negatively related to labor force participation. Household size is probably a measure of both the number of persons in the household as well as its social composition. The more persons residing in the household, and most likely the larger the number of dependent children, the more restricted all the adults are in their ability to search for a job and accept one. With the average household size

among Southeast Asian refugees at approximately six persons, the kinds of demands on adults to take on family responsibilities are considerable.

Refugees resettled in California also have lower rates of participation than those residing elsewhere in the United States. It is important to emphasize that this lower participation can not be explained by the primary background characteristics which nearly all research studies have recognized as essential. Refugees in California do not seem to participate less often than others because of their lesser background status and personal skills. Moving ahead for a moment to column two, the coefficient for residence in California remains the same even after years in the United States are also taken into account. Clearly, unique resettlement experiences in California are the most likely explanation for this sizeable negative relationship.

As indicated previously, the final variable in column one is a measure of how much improvement in English proficiency has been achieved while the refugee has been in the United States. This is the only variable in column one whose relationship to labor force participation is likely to be confounded by ambiguity in temporal sequence. Although the baseline for measuring improvement is before the refugee arrived, and therefore before he or she had a chance to enter the labor force, it is not possible with these data to determine whether any increase in English proficiency occurred before the refugee began looking for a job or working, or whether it took place afterwards. The potential bias introduced, however, is a conservative

one. If English improvement does occur as a result of engagement in the labor market, then the relationship measured here should be overstated for those who are now also participating. Yet the results show that English improvement neither increases nor decreases the probability of labor force participation, after considering the refugees' background skills, including English proficiency that was brought with them to the United States. This is consistent with the more detailed discussion of English proficiency as a mechanism for economic progress presented in subsection E.

Column two presents the same regression results on the total refugee population with only one addition: years in the United States is included in the equation. As discussed in more detail in subsection D below, years in the United States is the variable which most studies emphasize as the strongest single predictor of labor force participation and employment. The interpretation of this relationship, however, is frequently biased or incorrect. I have included it in these summary equations to show the general influence it appears to exert on a refugee's chances of participation.

As expected, years in the United States has a strong, positive effect on labor force participation. More important, however, are the changes its consideration brings to the relationship between the English language variables and labor force participation. Comparison of the difference in each variable's coefficient between column one and two measures the impact of comparing individuals who have arrived in the United States in the same year. With the exception of the English language variables, the relationships to participation

reported in column one remain the same. For example, the difference between men and women remains the same (b=.10) in both column one and two.

English proficiency at arrival, however, loses its significant relationship to participation. In column one, the coefficient is a statistically significant .07; in column two it is no longer significant, having essentially no predictive power. In contrast, the relationship of English improvement to participation is significant only after considering the refugees' years of arrival. Interestingly, however, the relationship is negative, indicating counterintuitively that the more English proficiency a refugee acquires, the lower their probability of labor force participation.

What explains these changes in the relationships of English language proficiency to labor force participation? In the first instance, the importance of English language proficiency at arrival appears to be that it is only one characteristic of very different cohorts or conditions faced by refugees who entered the United States in the same year. Rather than serving as an indispensable skill with which to compete in the U.S. labor market, the observed importance of English skills is related to a wider set of group characteristics and circumstances. Although there are few clues as to what these other characteristics may be, the important result here is the surprising relative insignificance of English proficiency in predicting labor force participation.

In the second instance, the counterintuitive negative relationship between English improvement and participation is more

easily unraveled. Results from previous studies can be pieced together to explain this relationship. From Reder's studies of English acquisition, we know that the best way to improve language proficiency is through classroom training. But classroom training generally takes the student out of the labor force (see Table 10 in this report for additional support). The change in the coefficient for English improvement in these results suggests that the refugees who improved their English skills the most probably attended English Language Training classes. As a result, they improved their English but were less likely to be searching for employment. Results in column two, therefore, show that once the variations in English proficiency among the yearly cohorts of arrivals are taken into account, classroom training emerges as an alternative to labor force participation.

The reason for presenting the same type of analysis separately for men and women is based on the very sizeable gender differences reported in columns one and two for the total population. Such a significant gap raises the additional possibility that the relationships between other variables and labor force participation may be different for men and women. That is, not only do men and women have different levels of labor force participation, but the way in which background variables influence participation may be different for each group. Although Baker and North found that men and women in the 1975 cohort differed only in their average rates, and not in the process of entering the labor force, the possibility still requires investigation here.

The comparisons of interest are now between the figures in column one for men and column one for women. An initial point of interest is found in the bottom row of the table. The same set of variables explains only 19 percent of the variation in women's labor force participation, while for men it explains a full 29 percent. Youth appears to be less of a labor force penalty for women than men, as does residence in California. Overall, these commonly emphasized variables appear to fit more the experiences of male refugees than their female counterparts.

Although several other specific contrasts are worthy of attention, the primary difference between men and women occurs in the relationship of English improvement and labor force participation. For men, the importance of training programs follows the pattern described above. For women, however, English improvement facilitates labor force participation by three percentage points. Given that refugee women have a lower level of English proficiency than men upon arrival, this positive influence suggests the significance of obtaining a minimal level of language skill. This speculation gains some support from the coefficient in column two. If controlling for year of arrival in the United States uncovers the negative influence of English language training, as suggested above, women do not seem to find classroom attendance as much an impediment. Although the direction of the relationship is negative ($b = -.01$), the magnitude of the effect is essentially zero.

In sum, this analysis shows that refugees who had privileged positions in their countries of origin are more likely and successful

in seeking employment during their early years in the United States. As expected, background characteristics and experiences are the most important predictors of labor force participation; foreign schooling alone is the single most significant factor. In the United States, the large size of the households formed during resettlement tends to inhibit participation; residence in California is also an impediment.

Although each of these relationships requires further investigation, the substantial differences between men and women and the relative insignificance of English proficiency are especially provocative. In this analysis, the differences between men and women that arise from their former experiences abroad do not explain the gap in labor force participation rates. Although other background characteristics not measured here may account for these differences, women undoubtedly confront conditions in the United States that impede their participation. Possible explanations include the composition, as opposed to the mere size, of their households, the availability of entry-level jobs, and perhaps the differential resources that sponsors, agencies, and other personal contacts make available to men but only less frequently to women.

English proficiency, according to these results, has a relatively small and complex relationship to labor force participation. This complexity is explored in more detail in a later subsection. In general, however, English proficiency appears to serve more as a symbol of a refugee's other advantages that lead to labor force participation, such as education, than it does as a specific, indispensable work-related tool. Improvement in English proficiency

may also lead to contradictory results, perhaps impeding early entry to the labor force. Of course, this type of early impediment may become the basis for long-term progress, as those who have supported "front-end loading" programs have long argued. English proficiency may also be of considerable value in other, as important, areas of social life. These results, however, do not support claims that English proficiency is essential to early participation in the labor market and to the successful acquisition of a job.

B. Age and Education

There is not much controversy over how age and education influence labor force participation. As noted previously, the relationship between age and employment is a familiar, well-defined pattern. That refugees also appear to fit this pattern suggests that they have been incorporated well into the dynamics of the labor market. For example, if they have faced distinctive problems, it may be possible to detect them through an unexpected drop in labor force participation at certain ages. The only notable difference, however, in the refugees' age-participation profile, compared to the U.S. population, is its relative "flatness" during the prime working ages. In the U.S. population, participation rates rise throughout the prime working ages until they begin their descent. Among refugees, the differences between the early and middle years of the prime working ages is minimal. This minor difference simply reflects the much more difficult problem all refugees face in entering the labor force and securing employment.

In absolute terms, refugees are "penalized" for a much younger

aged population than the U.S. population. As shown above, a full third of the refugees are old enough to be eligible for work, but young enough to be involved in education and training. In addition, young workers, especially among minorities, characteristically face the severest employment barriers in the United States. To the extent that the refugee population has a disproportionate share of youths, its overall employment status will remain lower than for the U.S. population. This is a common demographic "problem" faced by many minority groups in the United States.

Foreign education, as a factor that facilitates participation and employment in the United States, has several interpretations. The most common is that education bestows on the refugee an ability or skill that permits easier adjustment to the United States. It may also provide a skill that is directly needed in the United States. The latter explanation, however, is weakened by the general lack of correspondence between the refugees' former and U.S. occupations. Professionals, for example, often require recertification before their teaching or medical degrees are acceptable to U.S. institutions.

Education may also serve as a resource that does not necessarily promote high absolute levels of employment, but rather serves as a fundamental source of differentiation within the refugee population. That is, in absolute terms, even the most educated refugees have problems in the U.S. labor market. The significance of education in most studies of refugees involves whether it yields an edge over other refugees. In this case, educational backgrounds may still serve as skills among refugees. Higher education may be a "selling point" for

employers willing to hire refugees. It may also evoke a more energetic response from sponsors and agencies who come to believe those with more education are more employable. And better education may be one of the dimensions that household members use to decide who is going to search for employment.

Although neither age nor former education are malleable conditions of refugees' experiences around which programs are designed, together they offer promising signs for the future. In the short-run, the relative youthfulness of the population and the overwhelming importance of former education poses problems for entry into the labor market and employment. But in the long-run, these same youths, many of whom are now completing their education in the United States, will become the adults of the prime working ages. With U.S.-based certification, and moving beyond the inherent disadvantages of the youth labor market, the refugee population as a whole should increase its labor force participation rates and improve its economic status.

C. Gender

In both the comparison of the refugee and U.S.-born populations and among the refugees themselves, refugee women face significant disadvantages in the labor market. Their labor force participation rate is persistently over 15 percentage points below their male counterparts. Their employment ratio is at least 10 percentage points less than the men. Although the difference between refugee men and women is about the same as between native-born men and women, the difference may be more important to the economic status of the refugee

population. Women have long played a major economic role in immigrants' economic progress in the United States. Given the relatively low absolute levels of refugee women's labor force participation, it seems likely that their economic contributions are underutilized.

Of equal significance is that refugee women's lower labor force participation, relative to refugee men, can only be partially explained by their lesser training. As described previously, refugee women are less educated and less proficient in English than their male counterparts. Yet, even after taking these and other factors into account, the general model of labor force participation presented previously shows that women have a 17 percent lower rate of labor force participation.

Refugee women encounter several employment-related problems, some similar to those faced by U.S.-born women. Numerous studies have documented refugee women's lower initial level of English proficiency, which is compounded by a lower rate of access to training classes and by relative isolation from working in the home. Lack of day care and transportation have also been identified as primary difficulties. For example, Rynearson and DeVoe, in an intensive field investigation focused on Laotian women in St. Louis, observed that men in the community were much more likely to be able to drive a car. If access to automobiles is indeed an important factor facilitating labor force participation and employment, as a number of studies suggest (CWS, San Diego, Aames et al.), then women may lack access to this vital resource even when the cars are physically available.

Rynearson and DeVoe also observed that the local Laotian community's open style of sharing childcare duties contributed directly to the women's increased ability to enter the labor force and begin their search for a job. Childcare assistance has also enabled these women to hold onto their jobs after they had been successful in finding one. Indeed, in most of the households they observed, both men and women perceived the wife's participation in outside employment as essential to the support of the family.

D. Time in the United States

It is not surprising that, in nearly every study of Southeast Asian refugees, time plays a major analytical role. After all, refugee resettlement can only be understood as it unfolds over time. In terms of employment, even the most cursory review of existing studies shows that length of residence in the United States is believed to be the single most important factor in the refugees' economic progress. With few deviations, each additional year of residence appears to improve labor force participation, the employment-population ratio, and the unemployment rate. Nearly every study confirms this encouraging relationship. An example to show the magnitude of this relationship is presented in Table 4. The figures are derived from the 1983 Annual Survey of Refugees. They show both the labor force participation rate and the employment-population ratio for each yearly cohort of arrivals. Clearly, those who arrived in 1975 have achieved a very high rate of participation, outstripping the 1982 arrivals by nearly 29 percentage points. If these cohort comparisons are taken as yearly increases, then an estimate of the

rate of economic progress, measured by the average yearly rise in labor force participation rates, is roughly 10 percent per year. Although the magnitude varies across the other studies reviewed, the general substantive conclusions remain the same.

This optimistic pattern of economic advancement for each successive cohort has been the primary motive for many in drawing the conclusion that refugees do better the longer they live in the United States. In turn, this has encouraged theoretical and policy conclusions that focus on the passage of time as the primary factor influencing economic progress. The length of time may still be unacceptably prolonged, but confidence in the end result is remarkably strong. One reason is that this statistical relationship has also been observed among the total immigrant population. In a popular study, Barry Chiswick showed that length of time in the United States was the most important factor in explaining newcomers' economic progress. In addition, immigrants progressed very rapidly, often overtaking the economic status of the native-born population in ten to fifteen years.

Perhaps more important than this statistical observation, however, was the widespread interpretation of these results as indicative of a form of assimilation, the acquisition of American values, skills, and behaviors over the years that lead to becoming more like the host population. Chiswick calls it "Americanization". This interpretation supports a laissez-faire attitude toward immigrants' and refugees' employment: Given time, newcomers will learn to be American, and in doing so, will become economically

Table 4: Labor Force Participation and Employment by Year of Entry: All Individuals 16 Years of Age or Over, 1983*

Year of Entry	Labor Force Participation %	Employed %
1975	69.7	61.0
1976-77	79.5	65.9
1978	68.2	54.3
1979	60.5	49.5
1980	55.3	43.6
1981	46.5	38.7
1982	40.9	28.4
1983	20.7	9.1

Source: Annual Survey of Refugees, 1983.

* All percentages are weighted by household size.

successful. Problems may arise, in this view, because either the newcomers fail to learn American attitudes and values, or because barriers are put in their way - sometimes in the name of helping them.

In this view, refugees' problems in achieving self-sufficiency is interpreted as refugees' lack of, or poor progress toward, learning American values, including its work ethic. In addition, it views public assistance programs -- although well meaning -- as barriers to progress which create a welfare mentality. All these attitudes or interpretations rely on the faith that there is an underlying, relentless push toward economic progress that somehow springs from the nature of the refugees or, better still, the competitive, open U.S. labor market.

This report is not the place to review the extensive research literature debunking this mythology of immigrants' economic progress. It is essential, however, to draw out clearly the biases and mistakes of interpretation that are made in the literature that places so much importance on the variable of length of residence or time in the U.S. This exercise is especially important because the analytical reliance on the variable, time in the United States, obscures influential factors that shape how and at what pace refugees move into and through the labor market.

In an earlier study of Southeast Asian refugees' economic statuses, Bach and Bach urged the following caution on those who were rushing to emphasize the observed correlation between length of time in the United States and economic progress:

> "the lower employment ratios and labor force participation rates of newer arrivals may be

> caused by either differential time in the United States, lesser background skills, or even divergent opportunities in areas of resettlement. This question remains largely unexplored, however, because a proper research design would require observations of the same individuals (or groups) over time; a longitudinal study...."
>
> (Bach and Bach, 1980: 34)

The immediate need for this warning was the serious limitations of design in Chiswick's research, restrictions that are reproduced in nearly every study of Southeast Asian refugees. In all these studies, including the Annual Survey of Refugees used in Table 4, data are collected at one point in time; that is, the studies are cross-sectional, not longitudinal. A very well-known problem with cross-sectional studies is the inability to distinguish among so-called age, period, and cohort effects. Age is the amount of time a person has been in a certain condition (for example, years in the U.S.); period is the context or opportunities and constraints in which a person is at any given time; and, cohort is the characteristics and organization of the group in which a person is a member as a result of participating in events that cover a certain time.

Clearly time, as a variable, stands for three very different phenomena, and must be interpreted with full recognition of all three possibilities. The popular strategy discussed above, however, is to interpret year of arrival in the United States as only an "age effect", that is, the actual number of years of residence. Probable biases in such studies are obvious. Although duration of residence is certainly important, providing "time" to acquire skills or simply to overcome physical and mental fatigue, the timing of resettlement is

also essential, including the conditions of local labor markets, the shape of resettlement programs, sponsorship types, public funding, etc. In addition, the organization of each cohort, not only the individual characteristics of individuals in each group of arrivals, may be a crucial determinant of the refugees' economic progress. Questions of the size, composition and resources of local communities and formerly resettled members of the same family or ethnic group are included in this possible source of economic influences.

As a result of these potential, but neglected factors, conventional studies using length of time in the United States as the primary factor in economic progress present and promote a strongly biased account of how refugees enter and participate in the labor market. The impact of such a bias, as I have suggested, is to strengthen a view of economic progress that obscures the realities of labor market conditions that refugees, and native-born U.S. workers as well, face in the U.S. labor market. But the bias is not simply interpretative. Recent research, less constrained by data limitations, has been able to demonstrate the magnitude of the error in previous studies of immigrants' economic progress.

Availability of the 1980 U.S. Census allows an estimate of the progress of immigrants' economic status from 1970 to 1980. The question of interest is how does the <u>same</u> cohort of arrivals recorded in the 1970 Census fare ten years later. Although methodological problems still hinder this type of analysis, following the same group over time represents a vast improvement over cross-sectional studies. In a recent article, George Borjas has compared Chiswick's estimates

of the length of time for immigrants to reach economic levels comparable to the U.S. workforce, calculated from the 1970 Census, with new estimates gained by comparing the same cohorts in the 1970 and 1980 census. Although Borjas still confuses period and cohort effects, specifically the characteristics of the immigrants from the conditions they face in the economy, his method does allow a more accurate estimate of the newcomers' real progress over the ten years observed. Comparison of cross-sectional estimates of the growth rate in earnings from the 1980 census - the Chiswick method - to the cohort growth rate derived from comparing the real changes in earnings between 1970 and 1980 for the same group, Borjas finds that the former method overestimates the improvement in earnings by a factor of 3 or 4. In addition, whereas Chiswick estimates the time it would take for newcomers to reach earnings parity with the U.S. population at between 10 and 15 years, these new estimates show a radically different picture. For all immigrant groups, the time to reach a "crossover" point is much longer, and in some cases exceeds thirty years. Indeed, for a few immigrant groups, the point of crossover may be unrealizable.

Clearly, these figures show a much less optimistic view of the time trend in immigrants' economic progress. Length of time is still important, but it is much less important than most have assumed. Of course this analysis still does not identify the "period effects" that may be influential during the 1970s in limiting the newcomers' economic progress. The need to identify these factors, however, becomes clearly evident.

Limited evidence is available from research on the Southeast Asian refugees to begin to study the economic progress through time in this improved analytical manner. Table 5, for example, offers a rare glimpse of the economic progress of the various yearly cohorts of refugees in each of the last three years. The number of years refugees have been in the United States clearly is an important feature of their labor market progress. The initial months of resettlement are full of activities that inhibit immediate entry into the labor force. Such conditions change, however, quite rapidly for the refugee population as a whole. By following the yearly group (left hand column) across each row, progress toward increasing labor force participation and decreasing unemployment becomes clear. For example, in the top half of the table, the labor force participation rate for those who entered in 1981 was only 22.8 percent in October of the same year. Twelve months later, that rate had increased to 41.5 percent, and by October, 1983, had climbed to 46.5 percent.

Even with this general year-by-year improvement, however, the economic recession damaged considerably the progress of refugees in the labor market. The bottom half of Table 5 reports the unemployment rates for each yearly cohort for each of the last three years for which national level data are available. Two general patterns are discernible. First, among the latest arrival cohorts, the very high levels of unemployment in the first year or two of U.S. residence drop precipitously. The cohort of arrivals in 1982 faced a 62.5 percent unemployment rate. That is, although their labor force participation was very low as a group, even those who were actively looking for work

Table 5: Labor Force Participation Rates and Unemployment, Yearly Cohorts of Southeast Asian Refugees

Year Entered the U.S.	Labor Force Participation		
	In 1981	In 1982	In 1983
1983	—	—	20.7
1982	—	25.2	40.9
1981	22.8	41.5	46.5
1980	52.8	51.3	55.3
1979	49.2	60.2	60.5
1978	48.8	67.6	68.2
1976-77	70.7	74.3	79.5
1975	76.0	72.1	69.7
U.S. Rates	64.0	64.1	64.1

	Unemployment Rates		
	In 1981	In 1982	In 1983
1983	—	—	55.0
1982	—	62.5	30.4
1981	45.2	40.7	16.8
1980	27.1	32.1	21.1
1979	8.1	19.3	17.8
1978	5.0	19.0	19.7
1976-77	3.5	9.4	17.2
1975	6.4	12.7	12.1
U.S. Rates	7.5	9.9	8.2

Source: Annual Survey of Refugees

could not find it. Only one year later, however, their unemployment rate had been cut in half. Similar declines, although at lower levels, were experienced by both the 1981 and 1980 cohorts.

A second pattern is an increase in unemployment among those who had been in the United States the longest. The 1975 cohort, for example, had achieved an unemployment rate of only 6.4 percent by 1981, six years after arrival. During the 1982 recession, however, their unemployment doubled; and by October, 1983, the rate had barely begun to improve. Jobless rates among the 1976-77 and 1978 cohort increased even more dramatically, showing few signs of return to previous levels by late 1983.

Baker and North have created a dataset that offers considerable potential for understanding more clearly what happens to refugees the longer they are in the U.S. labor market. They have constructed a longitudinal file of 1975 arrivals, gathering observations from the records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the Social Security Administration on the same persons at later years. Using employment population ratios as the measure of labor market status, they found that the 1975 arrivals took only five years to reach the employment level of the native-born U.S. population. Viewed relative to the period of reimbursement for cash and medical assistance under the Federal refugee program, such progress may be disappointing, but in comparison to other immigrants, it is a remarkably brief period. Of course, the background characteristics of this cohort may explain this relative progress. Baker and North's methodology does not allow a strict comparison to Borjas' results from the censuses. Baker and

North did find, however, that within the 1975 cohort, background characteristics, skills and economic status held in the country of origin were the strongest predictors of employment in each of the three years, 1978, 1979, and 1980.

Once the refugees are in the United States, according to Baker and North, two characteristics of the context of the resettlement program influenced the refugees' progress. First, in each of the years studied, secondary migrants, defined as a person who changes residence during the preceding one year, had more difficulty in finding jobs at their place of relocation than non-migrants in the same area. Although this relationship is contrary to results on the effects of secondary migration from other studies, it clearly identifies the geographical distribution of the resettlement effort as one "contextual" or "period" influence on economic progress.

Second, Baker and North found that 1975 arrivals who were resettled to California had lower employment ratios than those living elsewhere. This fully supports the results from the Annual Survey presented above. They conclude that it was the "relatively generous terms of refugee cash assistance" that have had a negative impact on labor market activity. Whether this is the reason or not is still open to debate. But in conjunction with the results from the above regression analysis, their findings suggest very strongly that the character of the resettlement program in California, instead of the characteristics of the refugees themselves, may be an essential factor in understanding variations in the refugees' progress over time.

A final important observation from this longitudinal study

involves the nature of labor market opportunities for refugees. Although Baker and North do not raise this issue in the same context, they point out that an appreciable number of refugees have apparently moved out of jobs with officially reported earnings and into work activities in which they were paid in cash. I pursue this research lead in a later section on jobs. For present purposes, however, it is important that the type of "underground work" that employs Southeast Asian refugees is concentrated in very distinctive local labor markets. Los Angeles and San Jose, California, are two areas that have the type of industry in which "outwork" activities are proliferating. The conditions faced by refugees in these local labor markets are essential to whether and in what ways they locate employment.

There are other methods for trying to recover a clear view of the temporal sequences through which refugees pass into the labor market. The Bureau of Social Science Research (BSSR), for example, used a measure of labor force participation that expresses the proportion of a refugee's total time in the United States that was spent participating in the labor market. Similar to the Baker and North results, background characteristics had the strongest predictive power of the amount of time spent in the labor market (labor force participation ratio) than other variables. Education before arrival, for example, was the best predictor, followed by the person's former occupation. Unfortunately, the comparative importance of experiences in the United States are obscured by the types of variables chosen for inclusion in their analysis. BSSR reports, for example, that the time

spent on income support in the United States had the strongest effect on predicting time in the labor force. Once again the availability of public assistance programs appears as a crucial determinant of employment status. Time spent on income support, however, is to a large extent merely the inverse measure of the time in the labor market. Especially among newly arrived refugees, the two are probably measuring the same behavior, absence or presence of employment. In addition, both measures are cumulative scores of periods of time between which there is no clear temporal ordering. As a result, using time spent on assistance to predict the duration of labor force participation leads to very little new information and reduces the apparent magnitude of other variables, such as family composition, which BSSR also finds to be a statistically significant predictor of labor force participation ratios.

In sum, the tendency throughout the research literature to focus on the length of residence in the United States as a primary predictor of labor force participation leads to biased and overly optimistic conclusions. The analytical problem arises when time in the United States is used as a factor to explain economic progress. Duration of time by itself, contrary to popular wisdom, does not explain anything. Something happens during that time, and that is what is important to identify as precisely as possible. Other factors related to background characteristics, group organization, geographical distribution, and conditions of the national and local labor market are of possibly equal or even greater importance. Indeed, as time spent in the United States has only an ambiguous and, as used most

frequently, prejudicial meaning, the practice should be to underemphasize its analytical significance.

E. English Language Proficiency

A refugee's ability to speak and write in English is recognized as essential by everyone involved in or observing the resettlement process. But there is some disagreement over just how important it is for employment. Conventional wisdom sides most strongly with those who believe it is paramount. Several survey studies of the refugee population support this view (e.g., Aames et al., 1977), although in the majority of studies English proficiency is only one of several significant factors. Other researchers have found that English knowledge is an important job-related tool only in certain circumstances, actually varying in its significance from almost none to virtually necessary. Still others question its necessary role. The General Accounting Office observed the following:

> While English-speaking ability is important and can increase chances for successful long-term employment, our inquiries at service providers indicated, as they did for our work at voluntary agencies, that lack of English-speaking ability was not an insurmountable barrier to employment. Only 7 percent of our sampled refugees for whom ORR-funded service providers obtain employment were rated by the service providers as having good English-speaking ability, and 47 percent were rated as speaking English poorly or not at all. (GAO, 1983: 28)

There are several problems in analyzing the importance of English knowledge for employment. Temporal sequence is a primary one. All studies can point to a positive correlation between English language and employment. Only a few, however, can separate the probable

confounding of English proficiency before arrival from improvement in the United States, especially as the latter can be attributed to training programs and, most importantly for purposes here, whether English was a prerequisite for obtaining a job or was acquired as a result of working alongside native English-speakers.

A second problem is the extent to which English language capacity is intertwined, and therefore merely reflects, the socio-economic status of refugees in their countries of origin. Influences attributed to English language proficiency may be a result of previous education, training, and class resources that certain groups bring with them or are able to reproduce in the United States.

An example of the importance of both of these problems is provided by the studies of English language acquisition and training conducted by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. They established that the primary determinants of who learned English and attended English training classes in the United States, both presumably related to greater labor force participation and employment at some subsequent time, were pre-entry characteristics and experiences. Demographic characteristics, such as age and sex, and pre-entry social level, reflected in higher education, native language literacy, and previous bilingualism, accounted for most of the variation among refugees in English language proficiency. Groups that are disadvantaged also remain underserved, including women, older adults, and those with little education. Their results support other observations from Portes and Bach's longitudinal study of Mexican and Cuban immigrants: those newcomers who have higher education and

better training before arrival are disproportionately the ones to receive more education and training in the United States. In contrast, the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory study shows that only two experiences in the United States promoted improved English: classes in English language and employment.

These results suggest two very important points about the process through which English language facilitates employment. First, much of the observed, very strong association between English language proficiency and employment is due to the refugees' related high levels of former education and social status, both of which are not amenable to programmatic intervention in the United States. Those who have had social and economic advantages in their home countries are able, in comparison to other refugees, to reproduce those advantages in the United States. They improve their English and, as they are more likely to find jobs <u>irrespective</u> of their English capacities, enhance their English through employment.

Second, at the very least, the relationship between English language and employment is a complex one, not at all the simple instrument attractive to policy makers as the mechanism that generates jobs and, therefore, less "dependence" on public assistance. This complexity in the meaning of English knowledge is perhaps better revealed in some of the smaller studies of refugees, in particular those anthropological field studies that have observed the process of finding and holding onto jobs in great detail. Part of that complexity in how English language is used involves the conditions of the local labor market. In their survey of 273 heads of households in

the Portland metropolitan area, Pullen and Ryan observed that the importance of English language proficiency is inflated in their area because of the tight job market. In such conditions, employers can demand a higher skill level from everyone, and in this context, poor English becomes a clear factor that potential employers can use to differentiate among many applicants. This may help to explain, for example, the dramatic jump in unemployment among refugees during the 1982 recession (see Table 5). During in-depth interviews with 16 employers, however, they discovered that the perceptions of the importance of English language varies according to the actor in the labor market exchange. Employers rated English knowledge as a requirement for employment nearly twice as high as the refugees themselves.

One of the problems uncovered by this and other in-depth interview studies is that English knowledge may be more or less important at different points in the refugees' labor market experiences. In some instances, knowledge of English may be a minimal criterion for an employer to accept a refugee's application. But even this minimum is subject to change depending on conditions over which the refugees has little control. Pullen and Ryan offer the following example:

> They [most employers] say they will no longer hire a person who does not speak English well enough to communicate. (Pullen and Ryan, 1982/83: 40-41) (my emphasis)

Why the change? According to the authors, "The interviewer encountered some outright hostility from employers who expressed their

dissatisfaction with placement services which had not followed up after placing a refugee with poor English skills."

In addition to recognition of the conditions of the local labor market, there is a need to differentiate the usefulness of English as a job skill. For example, English proficiency may be less important to the acquisition of a job than to the refugee's performance and possibilities for promotion after he or she has been employed. Knowledge of English may also be evaluated differentially depending on the characteristics of the firm and the employer, the requirements of the job, and the social context of the workplace. Pamela DeVoe, in an excellent field study of employers' perceptions toward Southeast Asian refugees in St. Louis, discovered that language is perceived by employers differently than one might initially anticipate. For entry level jobs, poor English skills were not perceived as a problem if the employer had already hired a bilingual Southeast Asian or had free access to interpreters. As will be seen in the later section on job search methods, research conducted by the Bureau of Social Science Research confirms this observation. Personal contacts, including having other refugeee friends working for the potential employer, is the most frequent method used by refugees to find their first job in the United States. Clearly, then, the social context of how a refugee seeks a job influences the degree to which English proficiency is an employment problem.

Such assistance from friends or sponsors, however, may lead to later difficulties. For example, if sponsors perceive levels of English as an employment problem and try to assist by intervening in

the refugee's behalf with potential employers, the refugee may succeed in obtaining a job. But such aid may delay the consequences of poor English skills. The Pullen and Ryan study in Portland observed that, despite very favorable ratings as workers by employers, the refugees' prospects for advancement in their jobs were rated uniformly low. Employers viewed lack of English proficiency as the biggest impediment to promotion within the company.

F. Geography

There is a broad consensus, both of existing evidence and analytical commentary, that the refugee resettlement experience in California is different from that elsewhere in the United States. But there is virtually no agreement on the source or dimensions of this distinctiveness. From the analysis presented above, there is substantial evidence that the uniqueness of the California experience is not due simply to the differential social background composition of those who were resettled there.

What are the alternatives? Two explanations offer themselves immediately. California has by far a larger number of refugees than any other state. In the summary statistics from the Annual Survey discussed previously, California was the new home for roughly 38 percent of the Southeast Asian refugee population. They are also concentrated within California in only a few metropolitan areas. How such geographical concentration affects employment, however, is very much open to debate. Despite conventional wisdom that assumes physical concentration impedes employment, research on other immigrant groups has concluded that the social support that is fostered through

large geographical clusters facilitates successful searches for employment.

California also receives a large number of secondary migrants. I have chosen not to investigate the employment aspects of this difficult issue in this report because the quality of existing data is so poor. Data from the Annual Survey of Refugees suggest that secondary migrants generally have no better or worse labor market statuses than non-migrants. But if there is any significant bias in this Survey, it involves an undercount of those who have recently migrated. As a result, the evidence remains tentative.

Pullen and Ryan have found among the heads of households interviewed in Portland that secondary migrants are typically those who have progressed economically. Their study, however, involves only those who have been on public assistance in the last year or two. Caution is required in generalizing these results. In addition, their data compare secondary migrants to the population which they left behind. In California's case, the issue is whether migrants fare better or worse in the place of destination. Although a study conducted by the Los Angeles Department of Social Services argues that secondary migrants participate to a large extent in public assistance programs, methodological barriers prevent an adequate comparison to the nonmigrant refugee population.

Finally, Baker and North discovered from their longitudinal record of the 1975 arrival cohort that secondary migrants had a lower employment population ratio than nonmigrants even after controlling for demographic and social composition variables. This appears to be

the best evidence so far available, although it is unfortunately restricted to only the 1975 cohort. It is possible that over time the motivations and characteristics of secondary migrants may have changed as new Southeast Asian ethnic communities emerged, as the economy expanded or contracted in various locations, and as the complexity of ethnic and kinship networks multiplied.

Another popular explanation for the uniqueness of the California experience typically includes reference to the State's public assistance rules and practices. The basic, unemotional claim is that the California system provides an alternative means of support to immediate employment. Why and how it offers such an alternative leads to the controversy. The welfare system, some argue, is so generous in California that it eliminates the need and the desire to work. Texas, in contrast, where the benefits are much lower, has a resettlement record in which refugees participate in the labor force much more frequently than in California. Interestingly, however, I examined in the previous analysis of labor force participation whether residence in Texas contributed to higher rates of participation after controlling for the social characteristics of the refugees. As shown in Table 3, residence in California had a negative effect, but the influence of Texas was negligible as compared to the rest of the country.

A more plausible explanation involves the structure of public assistance programs in California. According to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, most of those on public assistance in California are on the AFDC-UP program, which covers two parent families with minor

children. Under this program, the principal wage earner cannot be required to accept a job if it pays less than the amount received from public assistance. In addition, if the principal wage earner worked more than 100 hours a month, the family would lose all assistance. Although little evidence exists to demonstrate the effect of these rules, it seems likely that they provide an alternative means of support for those who are likely to be able only to secure employment at essentially poverty level wages.

The public assistance system in California may well be a factor in the low labor force participation rates. But oversimplistic contrasts to the more niggardly Texas system do not capture the mechanisms that cause this distinctive pattern. Until better data are available, the uniqueness of the California experience will probably remain a mystery.

IV. Sponsorship and Labor Force Participation

Historically, the resettlement program has relied primarily on the active involvement of private American families and local church congregations to serve as sponsors for newly arriving refugees. Although little is known (at least documented) on the extent of other forms of sponsorship in this earlier period, it is generally accepted that one of the distinctive features of the program for Southeast Asian refugees has been the increasing assistance role performed by formerly resettled refugees. In the earliest years of this program, especially among the 1975 arrivals, American families responded to assist a large share of incoming refugees. After 1978, as the volume of the flow increased, voluntary agencies turned more and more to the

refugee families resettled a year to two previously to serve as sponsors. Most of these sponsorship families were relatives of the new arrivals, but a significant proportion were simply members of the same ethnic group.

Some controversy has developed around the differential contributions of these sponsorship types. As the entire resettlement program has been scrutinized to discover the source, and perhaps to levy blame for the relatively high rates of public assistance utilization, the increasing preponderance of refugee families as sponsors has caused some concern. The General Accounting Office, for example, highlighted the role of the various voluntary agencies and the types of sponsors each used as a factor contributing to the newcomers' slow progress toward self-sufficiency. Others have argued that formerly-resettled refugees advise and assist newcomers in obtaining the maximum assistance payments.

Of course, there are other explanations. Clearly, the forms of sponsorship mean more than friendly advice. Sponsors offer an incredibly large amount of resources to new arrivals, but not all sponsors are equal. The American families and congregations that responded in 1975 to the influx are likely to have had greater access to resettlement resources, including money, material, and employment contacts. Refugee families, as sponsors, do not necessarily contribute to greater assistance rates by advising newcomers of the wonders of the benefits, but they may lack the material resources and social connections to find jobs quickly. Of course, in other aspects of resettlement, refugee family sponsorship may provide greater

support than American families and local congregations.

Before any of these explanations can be considered, however, the most obvious reasons for the variation in employment outcomes among the sponsorship types must be ruled out. To the extent that the various forms of sponsorship resettled refugees with very different social backgrounds and timing of arrival, it may appear as if one form is more efficient than another. The analysis below attempts to take these characteristics into account to examine whether the forms of sponsorship have an independent influence on the rate refugees participate in the labor force.

Table 6 presents the results of the regression of labor force participation on type of sponsorship and selected characteristics of the refugees' social backgrounds. The purpose of the analysis summarized in this table is to examine in several ways whether and to what extent type of sponsorship influences levels of labor force participation. These figures (regression coefficients) are to be interpreted as increases or decreases in the probability of having or seeking a job as the result of a one unit change in the independent variable. For example, the .05 coefficient for education in column 2 shows that a refugee with one additional year of schooling before arrival has a five percentage point greater chance of having a job or actively seeking one than the person with one less year of education. The coefficients for sponsorship reveal the differences in the probability of labor force participation between having that particular type of sponsor as opposed to an American family sponsor.

The figures in column one show simply the average difference in

Table 6: Labor Force Participation of Southeast Asian Refugees by Type of Sponsorship and Social Backgrounds, 1983

Variable	Labor Force Participation			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	b	b	b	b
	(S.E.b)	(S.E.b)	(S.E.b)	(S.E.b)
Intercept	.64	.28	.16	.31
Congregational Sponsorship	-.12 (.03)	-.10 (.03)	.07 (.03)	-.09 (.02)
Relative Sponsorship	-.20 (.03)	-.16 (.03)	-.10 (.03)	-.11 (.02)
Unrelated person, same ethnicity, sponsorship	-.16 (.05)	-.14 (.05)	-.08* (.05)	-.09 (.04)
Other Sponsors**	-.13 (.04)	-.01* (.03)	--*	--*
Foreign Education		.05 (.002)	.04 (.002)	.04 (.002)
Time in U.S.			.02 (.003)	.02 (.003)
Age				.003 (.001)
Sex				.09 (.02)
Foreign English Proficiency				.06 (.01)
R^2	.02	.17	.18	.20

Source: Annual Survey of Refugees, 1983

Omitted Category is American family, see text; all variables are coded as an increasing scale; Sex, men=1, women=0.

* Not statistically significant at .01

** Mostly agency sponsorship

the labor force participation rate of refugees resettled by each type of sponsor and the comparison group, an American family sponsor. The category, Other Sponsor, consists primarily of agency sponsorships. As is clearly demonstrated, refugees sponsored by each type of sponsorship listed here have a significantly lower rate of labor force participation than those assisted by American families. For example, refugees resettled by congregational sponsors are 12 percentage points less likely to be employed or actively seeking work than those with American family sponsors. Refugees sponsored by relatives are a full 20 percentage points less likely to be labor force participants than those assisted by American families. Similarly, both unrelated members of the same ethnic group and other sponsorship types have an apparent disadvantage when compared with American family sponsorship.

The figures in columns 2 through 4 show the size of the differences between types of sponsorships after taking into account each background characteristic shown at the bottom of the table. These background characteristics are all important determinants of the rate of labor force participation. They include years of foreign schooling, time in the United States, age, sex, and English proficiency at the time of arrival. None of these factors refer to experiences in the United States over which the refugee or the sponsor could have had some control. Controlling statistically for their effects on labor force participation reduces the possibility that remaining differences among sponsorship types are due simply to the social composition of the refugees who were resettled by each type of sponsor.

The coefficients for sponsorship in column two compare the various types of sponsorship with American families after controlling for the educational backgrounds of the refugees resettled by each group. For example, among refugees with similar years of foreign education, congregational sponsorship still leads to a lower rate of labor force participation. Comparison of the coefficient for congregational sponsorship in column one (b = -.12), however, with the coefficient for the same variable in column two (b = -.10) shows that the differential educational background of the refugees in each sponsorship type account for some of the initial differences between them. In this case, approximately 16 percent of the initial gap between congregational and American family sponsorship types is due to the average higher education of refugees who were resettled by American families. A significant proportion of the initial disadvantage of the relative and unrelated friend is also due to the fact that American families have sponsored the better educated. The largest change, however, is in the Other Sponsor category. Initially, these agency sponsorships appeared to contribute to a thirteen percentage point labor force participation disadvantage among the refugees they have assisted. When educational backgrounds are taken into account, however, this thirteen point gap disappears. That is, for refugees with similar years of schooling in the countries of origin, it does not matter in terms of entry into the labor force whether they were resettled by an American family or an agency.

Columns three and four continue this type of analysis, controlling successively for additional background characteristics.

At this point it is unnecessary to describe each change in every coefficient. Instead, a clear pattern emerges from the series of equations represented in these columns. The figures in column three show that, when the differential time that refugees have had in the United States is taken into account, the size of the differences between American family sponsorship and the other forms is reduced even further. As would be anticipated, the involvement of American families in the earlier years of the resettlement program explains a major proportion of their apparent advantage in facilitating entry into the U.S. labor market.

The figures in column four, however, reveal that even after five major characteristics of the refugees backgrounds are taken into account, the refugees resettled by an American family have higher labor force participation rates than those assisted either by a congregation, a relative, or an unrelated member of his or her same ethnic group. In each case, the size of the differential is approximately 10 percentage points. These figures do not, in themselves, suggest that one form of sponsorship is better than another. They do imply, however, that refugees resettled by American families have access to more efficient resources for finding jobs and encouraging (or requiring) the newcomers to begin searching for employment.

V. Ethnicity and Labor Force Participation

Many studies have taken for granted that ethnic differences within the Southeast Asian refugee population were so vast that the groups could not even be legitimately combined for purposes of making

summary statements about the entire refugee population. Aames et al. (1977: 1) declare as follows: "it is essential when dealing with Indochinese assimilation in the United States to remember that the Vietnamese, Cambodians and Lao are separate cultures with their own distinct strengths, aspirations and problems. Since this is the case, the three groups are treated as separate entities in this report. The findings for each group are not added together to form some composite Indochinese profile." In principle, of course, this is wise practice. There are certain areas of social life, in particular, in which ethnic differences may be fundamental. The general workings of the marketplace, however, is one arena in which ethnic differences must be treated as an analytical question, rather than an assumption that shortcuts a certain type of analysis. Indeed, the homogenizing, standardizing pressures of wage work should operate to eliminate ethnic variations, and under conventional assumptions reduce differences among workers to simply their levels of training. Of course, there should be little doubt that these ethnic variations will not disappear. There is more than ample evidence to demonstrate that ethnicity of workers and employers are major factors influencing the economic progress of immigrant groups. Still, in this case we want to know how large the ethnic differences are, and whether they can be explained by such factors as the age, sex, and background compositions of the groups. For that reason, the strategy followed below is to pool the ethnic groups together to see whether one common set of labor market-related factors operates in general, and to what extent there remains unique differences for each ethnic group.

To examine possible ethnic differentials among the labor force participation of Southeast Asian refugees, Table 7 presents the results of the regression of the participation rate on membership in each of the numerically predominant ethnic groups and a set of background characteristics. The strategy employed here repeats the analysis of the labor force participation differentials among the different types of sponsorship presented in Table 6. Given the vast differences in the history and experiences of the six ethnic groups examined here, initially observed ethnic differentials in labor market behavior may be due to their varied social and demographic compositions. For example, the 1975 cohort of arrivals was overwhelmingly comprised of Vietnamese fleeing Saigon. Later arrivals consisted disproportionately of refugees from Kampuchea and Laos. By controlling for background or social composition variables, the question being pursued is whether there is an additional influence of membership in a particular ethnic group beyond the fundamental characteristics that affect employment among all individuals.

The ethnic groups examined in this analysis include the Chinese, Lao, Hmong, Vietnamese, Khmer, and others. The Vietnamese are used here as the comparison group because of their large share of the overall population and their concentration among the earliest arrivals. The background composition variables utilized in this regression analysis include age, sex, education in the country of origin, English proficiency before arrival, and time in the United States. The latter is used to represent the timing of arrival as well as the duration of time the person has been in the United States.

Table 7 presents an especially interesting set of results. In column one, the figures show the average differences in labor force participation between each of the ethnic groups listed there and the ethnic Vietnamese. Overall, three groups participate less frequently than the Vietnamese, the Chinese, Hmong, and Khmer. Both the Lao and other uncategorized ethnic groups have essentially the same participation rate. Of course, as shown in previous sections, labor force participation is influenced by many factors, especially the demographic and educational compositions of each group. The differences in column one, therefore, while accurately portraying the relative situation of ethnic groups in 1983, obscure reasons for the variation that may have little to do with the specific social organization of each respective group.

The figures in columns two through four show the results of the inter-ethnic group comparisons after taking into account the very different social backgrounds of each group. Column two presents the results after controlling statistically for education in the country of origin. Recall that foreign education is the most powerful predictor of labor force participation for the refugee population. The inclusion of foreign education changes considerably the comparisons with the ethnic Vietnamese. For each group, the higher educational backgrounds of the Vietnamese accounted for the initial contrasts in column one. Comparing individuals with similar levels of education, the initial lower rates of participation of the Chinese and the Khmer disappear, leaving no differences between them and the ethnic Vietnamese in their labor market activity. Educational

Table 7: Labor Force Participation of Southeast Asian Refugees by Ethnicity and Social Backgrounds, 1983

Variable	Labor Force Participation			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	b (S.E.b)	b (S.E.b)	b (S.E.b)	b (S.E.b)
Intercept	.57	.13	-.03	.12
Chinese	-.08 (.02)	.02* (.02)	.08 (.002)	.09 (.02)
Hmong	-.22 (.05)	.09 (.04)	.13 (.05)	.12 (.04)
Khmer	-.22 (.03)	-.05* (.03)	.04* (.03)	.03* (.03)
Lao	.02* (.02)	.18 (.02)	.25 (.02)	.24 (.02)
Other	.13* (.08)	.16 (.04)	.19 (.07)	.17 (.07)
Foreign Education		.05 (.002)	.05 (.002)	.04 (.002)
Time in U.S.			.03 (.003)	.03 (.003)
Age				.002 (.0005)
Sex				.08 (.02)
Foreign English Proficiency				.06 (.01)
R^2	.03	.18	.20	.22

Source: Annual Survey of Refugees, 1983.

Omitted Category is Ethnic Vietnamese, see text; all variables are coded as an increasing scale; Sex, men=1, women=0.

* Coefficient is not statistically significant at .01

background differences also obscured relatively higher rates of labor force participation among the Lao and other ethnic groups. In both cases, the initial comparison to the ethnic Vietnamese in column one showed no differences. But in column two, after controlling for educational background, both coefficients become strongly positive, exceeding their respective standard errors by at least a factor of four.

The comparison of the Hmong and the Vietnamese is of particular interest. As is well known, the Hmong are often considered the group least prepared for entry into the U.S. labor market. Comparison of results in column one and two shows strong support for this popular observation. In general terms, the Hmong are twenty-two percentage points less likely to participate in the labor force than the ethnic Vietnamese. But, when people at the same level of education are compared (column two), the Hmong are nine percentage points more likely to be actively engaged in the labor market than the ethnic Vietnamese.

Results in column three show the effect of taking into account the different timing of arrival for each group. As would be expected, the concentration of the ethnic Vietnamese in the earliest cohorts, especially in 1975, gives them a labor force participation advantage in 1983. When this differential timing of the flows is controlled, the positive contrasts between each ethnic group and the Vietnamese increases. This is especially important for the ethnic Chinese, many of whom arrived in late 1978 and 1979. From an initial lower participation rate in column one, controlling for educational and time

of arrival differences results in a significant eight percentage point advantage in labor market activity (column three, b=.08). The Hmong, Lao, and other ethnic groups also increase their advantage, while the Khmer remain at essentially the same level as the Vietnamese.

Finally, column four presents the inter-ethnic contrasts after controlling for education, time of arrival, age, sex, and English language proficiency before arrival. Results do not change much from those in column three. The Chinese participate at a rate nine percentage points higher than the Vietnamese. Higher levels are also the case for the Hmong (twelve percentage points), the Lao (twenty-four percentage points), and other ethnic groups (seven percentage points). In comparison with the results in column one, these figures show quite substantially that the observed differences among ethnic groups in the labor market are due in large part to their diverse experiences in the countries of origin. Differential access to education is the most important. These figures also show, however, that these background experiences do not diminish the importance of ethnicity even after several years in the United States. Clearly, there must be many more characteristics of the groups' experiences that account for their relative differences in labor force participation.

Perhaps the most intriguing result from this analysis, however, involves the relative position of the ethnic Vietnamese, who were used as the comparison group. Commonly portrayed as the most successful of the Southeast Asians, results here show that their advantage is linked to higher educational backgrounds in Vietnam, and to their

concentration in the earliest cohorts. But unexpectedly, after taking into account these relative background differences, including previous knowledge of English, the Chinese, the Hmong, and Lao participate in the labor force at higher rates than the Vietnamese.

VI. Methods of Job Search

Potentially, the most important characteristic of refugee resettlement involves the techniques used by refugees to search for and find jobs. These methods are, or should be, at the center of the debate over the various roles to be played in resettlement by the public and private sectors. Recent debates have often called for a much greater role of the private sector in resettling refugees. But, at least as far as employment is concerned, such a declaration implies that either the private sector is not already the leading factor in resettlement or it could substantially increase its involvement. Fortunately, most of the survey research on refugees has considered this an important issue and has asked questions concerning job search techniques. Of course not every study asked the same questions in similar ways. Yet, as the discussion below indicates, the results of these inquiries are remarkably consistent.

There are two complementary, yet distinctive, ways to analyze job search methods. The first is to attempt to establish the frequency of use among various job search techniques and to assess the efficiency or success of each method. This approach, however, requires information on every person both as they begin to look for a job and after a specific period. The requirements for such a longitudinal study are very demanding and few exist for the refugee population.

The obvious advantage, of course, is the ability to identify search techniques that are less successful. Not being able to do this becomes an evident problem when looking at the second, more common approach to investigating job search methods.

A second approach asks persons who are currently employed what source of information or contacts did they use to obtain their jobs. It also asks those who are currently seeking work for a list of the techniques they are employing. In the case of employed persons, information is obtained on only those who have been successful. No one knows, however, whether many more refugees have tried that particular method and failed. For those currently unemployed, the problem is that the outcome of the search activities is still unknown. A disproportionate number of the unemployed could be using a particular technique, which might indicate the inefficiency of that method. However, if all those persons are subsequently successful in obtaining employment, the conclusions would of course be very different.

If the purpose of an investigation is not to evaluate the effectiveness of any particular method, however, but simply to identify and understand which methods refugees rely on, the figures generated by most studies of the second type are still of considerable value. Such a goal is of particular interest here as the aim is to determine the relative frequency of use of private and public information sources for those who find jobs. Table 8 presents data on sources of job information among refugees drawn from a variety of research reports. The lefthand column lists the variety of

information sources. Most of the studies used a similar list of sources, although on occasion I have had to recategorize sources to obtain reasonable comparability. Unless otherwise indicated, these sources represent the refugees' judgements of the source that they used to actually obtain a job. The relatively high percentage of persons who reported "Other" indicates either they did not remember which method was used, or that it was a combination of two or three techniques for which they could not decide on a primary source.

Table 8 shows general consensus among these studies. Overwhelmingly, the most prevalent techniques for job search are private. These private sources include the refugees' own initiative, which consists of walking into a potential employer's office or answering advertisements, help from other refugees and friends, and assistance from sponsors. In the only nationally representative survey included here, two of every three employed refugees reported that they obtained their jobs through these four sources of private assistance. Twenty-five percent believed they found their jobs on their own, while a full twenty-one percent used formerly resettled refugees. As a group reflecting the involvement of the local community, assistance supplied through other refugees, friends and sponsors helped over forty-two percent of the refugees who were currently employed to locate their jobs. Public agencies, either those specializing in service to refugees or to the general public, accounted for only 10.9 percent.

The BSSR study describes in more detail the actual nature of job search assistance. The most frequent source for refugees' <u>first jobs</u>

Table 8: Sources of Job Information

Source of Information	Annual Survey 1983	Aames et al. 1977*	BSSR 1980		San Diego 1981	
			First	Current	Past	Present
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Own Initiative	25.4	7.0	35	53	22.3	42.8
Other refugees	20.9	36.0	27	28	16.4	14.4
Friends, not refugees	9.2	6.0				
Sponsors	12.4	3.0	25	7	**	**
Refugee Service agency	5.3	27.0	6	4		
Public employment agency	5.6	3.0	4	7	8.2	4.1
Private employment agency	1.8	--	2	1	24.0**	9.9
Other	19.4	18.0	1	--	28.6	28.1

* Vietnamese only; figures for other ethnic groups follow similar pattern.

** Could not determine whether "private agency" referred to private employment agency or to VOLAG and sponsor.

in the United States, for example, was through personal contacts, involving slightly over one-half of the respondents. It describes this personal contact as follows:

> Usually, this occurred either when their sponsors sent them to the potential employer or when an employer also employed a friend or relative.

These statistical results add reliability to the numerically more limited, but qualitatively more detailed observations from anthropological field studies. In these studies, both sponsors and other refugees play a major role in finding jobs for newly-arrived refugees. This assistance frequently ranges from direct contact by a sponsor or friend with a potential employer to a more indirect, but equally supportive role involving childcare, transportation, and a variety of other services. According to BSSR, about one-third of the refugees, essentially the same as reported in the Annual Survey, found their first job on their own initiative.

It is also important to establish where these various contacts led; that is, who employed these refugees? According to the BSSR study, in their first jobs, refugees' employers were predominantly companies or corporations (62%), with individual or family businesses accounting for an additional eighteen percent. Most of the employers were white Americans (85%). Data from the Annual Survey of Refugees confirm this general picture. Clearly, the overwhelming majority of Southeast Asian refugees are entering the U.S. labor market through private assistance channels and locating employment in the private sector.

To find their current jobs, in contrast to their first jobs, most of the refugees said they used their own initiative, reflecting an expected, substantial increase in individual-based search techniques following the refugees' initial entry to the labor force. Some of this increase in self-initiated searches is undoubtedly related to the refugee's enhanced English language proficiency. Stephen Reder, for example, reports that only 10 percent of new arrivals possessed enough knowledge of English to begin to search for a job in their first month in the United States. Only twenty percent reported a basic, "survival" English during this period. After several years, however, the level of English proficiency increased substantially. Within only a couple of years, roughly two-thirds reported a survival level command of English. Personal contacts were still significant, however, but the frequency of use had declined to one-third. Among other changes, an important one is a drop in the frequency of assistance from sponsors. Clearly, as time passes refugees become less likely to use the resources that were so important in finding their first jobs. Of course, after receiving assistance to locate their first jobs, many refugees have generated their own contacts with employers and can now rely on what appears to be their own initiative.

Table 9 reports the frequency of utilizing search methods by those who are currently unemployed. Personal contacts are also important in this group. Approximately one-third of these refugees report relying on personal contacts or their own initiative. The largest share, however, are enrolled in a service agency. One in every four unemployed refugees are looking for work through the

refugee service agency. This utilization is, of course, much greater than the five percent of employed refugees who said the service agency helped them find a job. It is, however, entirely in accordance with expectations. Refugees, as well as native-born workers, often have to contact service agencies in order to receive unemployment insurance or other forms of public assistance. Due to the methodological problems described above, one may only speculate that those who have been unable to find jobs do not have or have lost the type of personal contacts through which others successfully secure employment.

Finally, Table 10 reports on the refugees' reasons for not searching for a job. At the top of the list is clearly the primary reason for working aged men and women not participating in the labor force. Over half (51.4%) are not looking for work because they either attend school or are enrolled in a training program. For comparative purposes, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that in the same month, October, 1983, only 15.5 percent of the U.S. population that was counted as out of the labor force listed school attendance as the reason. Household responsibilities, which occupied 50.2 percent of the total U.S. working aged population, were the primary reason for not partipicating in the labor force for only 12.1 percent of the refugees. Health problems prevented an equal share from participation. Only less than twenty percent of the refugees reported that their limited English prevented their search for a job, and this was often in combination with another reason. These figures suggest very strongly that classroom training and education are the primary factors in keeping refugees out of the labor force. If it is true

Table 9: Job Search Methods among the Current Unemployed

Method	Percentage*
Own initiative	12.2
Other refugees	15.1
Friends, not refugees	3.1
Sponsors	3.6
Refugee service agency	24.6
Public employment agency	18.6
Private employment agency	1.7
Public and private employment agencies	3.1
Other	18.0

Source: 1983 Annual Survey of Refugees

that the refugees' background training is the primary determinant of their labor force participation, this focus on retraining may represent a necessary move to overcome that strong effect.

VII. Jobs

A. General Patterns

A fundamental feature of nearly all immigrant groups' earliest experiences in the U.S. labor market involves a significant decline in their former occupational status. In an early study of the Southeast Asian refugee population, Marsh found among the arrivals before November, 1978, that 56 percent of the heads of households who were formerly employed as white-collar workers had located blue-collar jobs in the United States. These included craftwork, transportation, farm management, and general laboring tasks, among others. Among former Vietnamese professionals alone, 42 percent lost their white-collar job status as they entered the U.S. economy. Aames et al. also report that among their sample of earliest arrivals in California, even though most had been professionals, military officials or businesspersons in Southeast Asia, those employed in the United States were manual workers. Interestingly, perhaps because they recognized which jobs were available to them, most of these refugees aspired to manual, skilled craft jobs.

A primary reason for this occupational shift is, of course, the difficulties immigrants and, especially, refugees have in transferring their certification or skills from abroad to the United States. Often overlooked, however, is a more general pattern of insertion into the U.S. economy. Since World War II, nearly all immigrant groups have

Table 10: Reasons for Not Seeking a Job

Reasons	Percentage
Attends school or training	51.4
Child care responsibilities	12.1
Poor health or handicapped	9.8
Limited English	9.2
Limited English and child care	4.5
Limited English and training	3.2
Limited English and poor health	2.6
Other	7.2

Source: Annual Survey of Refugees, 1983

concentrated disproportionately in the manufacturing sectors of the U.S. economy. Bach and Tienda have shown that this pattern contrasts strikingly with the general movement of U.S. workers out of the manufacturing sector during the last ten to twenty years. Despite the distinctive characteristics of the Southeast Asian refugees and their resettlement program, they have joined other immigrant groups in a large-scale concentration in manufacturing jobs.

As Table 11 indicates, over forty percent of all Southeast Asian refugees who were employed in 1983 worked in manufacturing, most of whom were in durable goods production. The second largest industrial sector concentration was in retail sales, another traditional source of employment among immigrants. A large proportion of these jobs were in eating and drinking establishments, places where characteristically fluid jobs offer easy entry but little security, advancement, or sufficient wages. Finally, despite the general downward move for former professionals, a full fifteen percent of the refugees continued in their professional and related activities. Many of these professionals were employed in education-related jobs.

Table 12 provides a detail listing of the occupations held by Southeast Asian refugees. Four broad occupational categories employ roughly the same proportion of refugees: technical, sales and administrative support (24.4%), service (21.9%), precision production, craft, and repair (21.4%), and operators and fabricators (19.3%). This fairly broad distribution of refugee workers throughout the occupational spectrum, however, obscures an underlying commonality. With the exception of those who have retained their professional level

Table 11: Sector of Employment: All Employed Individuals 16 Years of Age or Over, 1983*

Sector	Percentage
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing	1.7
Mining	0.4
Construction	0.8
Manufacturing - nondurable	10.8
Manufacturing - durable	30.0
Transportation, Communication, Public Utilities	3.3
Wholesale Trade	2.0
Retail Trade	23.9
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	3.1
Business and Repair Services	1.7
Personal Services	5.1
Entertainment and Recreation Services	0.5
Professional and Related Activity	15.0
Public Administration	1.7

Source: Annual Survey of Refugees, 1983

* All percentages are weighted by household size.

occupations, the overwhelming majority of the refugees were employed in relatively low skilled jobs. In each of the broad occupational groups, the largest number worked in jobs that require the least amount of training or preparation.

A better appreciation of the character of the refugees' jobs is provided by the figures in Table 13. The table lists the most frequently held jobs among all employed refugees. These twenty-one occupations employ over fifty percent (50.5%) of the refugee workforce. With few exceptions, these are unskilled or semi-skilled jobs that require little certification to enter and, in general, few opportunities for on-the-job training and advancement.

B. An Example of Job Conditions

The figures in Table 13 begin to reveal some of the peculiarities of the refugees' work experiences. A substantial subgroup has found employment in the electronics industry, where in places such as Silicon Valley and Los Angeles, California, available jobs are proliferating rapidly. Depending on the type of job within the industry, work in the electronics field often provides numerous opportunities for skill upgrading and advancement. According to Christine Finnan, job training programs in California have reportedly identified electronics as an attractive target for the refugee population and have organized many of their programs to prepare the newcomers for it.

The electronics industry offers, however, an increasingly differentiated set of occupations. Although one group of jobs, the best advertised, involve advanced engineering or programming skills,

Table 12: Current Occupation: All Employed Individuals 16 Years of Age or Over, 1983*

Occupation	Percentage
Manager, Professional	6.9**
Electrical and electronic engineers	15.3***
Management and related occupations	7.2
Social workers	6.6
Editors, reporters, translators, interpreters	6.4
Artists, performers, related workers, n.e.c.	5.8
Operations and systems researchers, analysts	4.8
Technical, Sales, and Administrative Support	24.4
Electrical and electronic technicians	8.5
Cashiers	8.3
Supervisors and proprietors, sales	8.1
Computer operators	7.8
Bookkeepers, accounting and auditing clerks	6.1
General office clerks	4.6
Teachers' aides	4.1
Secretaries	3.0
Typists	2.5
Administrative support occupations, n.e.c.	2.3
Sales counter clerks	2.2
Stock and inventory clerks	1.8
Clinical laboratory technologists, technicians	1.7
Order clerks	1.4
Cost and rate clerks	1.4
Service	21.9
Janitors and cleaners	26.6
Cooks, except short order	12.7
Kitchen workers, food preparation	10.9
Maids and housemen	10.5
Waiters' and waitresses' assistants	8.8
Waiters and waitresses	8.0
Nursing aides, orderlies, and attendants	4.5
Short order cooks	3.7
Launderers and ironers	2.5
Food counter, fountain and related jobs	2.1
Miscellaneous food preparation	1.9
Attendants, amusement and recreation	1.5

Table 12: continued

Farming, Forestry, and Fishing	1.8
Groundskeepers and gardeners, except farm	55.1
Farm workers	24.1
Precision Production, Craft, Repair	21.4
Electrical and electronic equipment assemblers	30.0
Machinists	7.6
Automobile mechanics	4.2
Carpenters	4.1
Inspectors, testers and graders	3.5
Butchers and meat cutters	3.3
Operators and Fabricators	19.3
Textile sewing machine operators	22.4
Welders and cutters	15.3
Assemblers	10.7
Machine operators, not specified	7.0
Production inspectors, checkers, examiners	7.0
Laborers	8.4
Handpackers and packagers	30.3
Laborers, except construction	22.5
Production helpers	20.7
Stock handlers and baggers	8.7
Machine feeders and offbearers	4.8

* All percentages are weighted by household size.
** Underlined percentages are based on the total employed population.
*** Subcategory percentages are based on the total employed in that broad occupational category.

Table 13: Most Frequent Current Occupations: All Individuals Currently Employed, 1983*

Occupation	Percentage
Electrical and electronic equipment assemblers	6.4
Janitors and cleaners	5.8
Textile sewing machine operators	4.3
Welders and cutters	3.0
Cooks, except short order	2.8
Handpackers and packagers	2.6
Kitchen workers, food preparation	2.4
Maids and housemen	2.3
Assemblers	2.1
Waiters' and Waitresses' assistants	1.9
Laborers, except construction	1.9
Electrical and electronic technicians	1.9
Cashiers	1.8
Supervisor and proprietor, sales	1.8
Waiters and waitresses	1.8
Computer operators	1.7
Production inspectors, checkers, examiners	1.4
Machine operator, not specified	1.3
Bookkeepers, accounting and auditing clerks	1.3
Groundskeepers and gardeners, except farm	1.0
General office clerks	1.0

* All percentages are weighted by household size.

the industry also offers larger proportions of low skilled manufacturing jobs. The figures reported here indicate that most of the refugees in this sector have been employed in the most routinized, least skilled jobs. Six percent of all the refugees were employed as electronic equipment assemblers. Only 1.7 percent reported their jobs as computer operators, a category, however, which also includes routine, semi-skilled tasks. The BSSR study also showed that men and women in this sector were similarly involved in low-skilled, low wage employment.

This emphasis in the electronics industry, much of which can be attributed to the refugees' geographical concentration in California, reveals an important feature of the effect of the U.S. modern economy on refugee resettlement. Although many authors have argued that few of the Southeast Asian refugees are prepared for the high technology base of the U.S. economy, few have recognized that these same "hi-tech" industries have generated a relatively large supply of unskilled jobs. These figures show that many of the refugees have succeeded in moving quickly into the most advanced sectors of the economy. They also show, however, the subordinate positions within the industries that have employed refugees.

Other researchers have emphasized that the electronics industry in California has become a major employer of all immigrant groups, not just Southeast Asian refugees. Indeed, electronic assembly jobs have become a new entry point to the U.S. economy for immigrants, much in the same way that the garment and steel industries were for newcomers in the past. Interestingly, the garment industry continues to play a

substantial role for the Southeast Asians. Sewing machine operators, most of whom are women, comprise a full four percent of all refugee workers.

The importance of employment in the electronics industry, especially in California, may help to explain one of the more intriguing characteristics of the refugees' employment experiences. As mentioned previously, Baker and North have observed that a significant share of the refugee workforce drops out of jobs that have officially reported earnings. These workers are still in their prime working ages and they apparently have already established employment histories that should lead to continued engagement in the labor force. Without the availability of additional evidence, Baker and North can only hypothesize that these workers have moved into the underground economy.

Discussions of the underground economy typically include a myriad array of occupations, ranging from "off the books" payment for relatively insignificant, part-time services, to full-time employment in a regular job in which payment is offered entirely in cash. The personal links that develop between refugees and sponsors or others in the local community certainly foster the performance of services for which the refuge is paid in cash. This type of activity undoubtedly explains why some might be engaged in the "underground economy". Yet, the most perplexing puzzle raised by Baker and North is that these refugees have already had jobs with officially reported incomes and, apparently, have left them. Infrequent, small-scale personalized services would not explain this change. Therefore, we should search

within the complexity of this underground economy for jobs that permit and encourage a shift toward jobs that yield cash payments. Part of the answer may involve the electronics industry.

The electronics industry has become one of the major culprits in an apparently widespread tendency to restructure industrial work that leads to a variety of forms of "outwork". Outwork is the performance of industrial, factory-type tasks outside the factory. Usually, the work is performed in the person's home or a makeshift shop, including garages and easily constructed additions to a house. The garment industry has for a long time fostered this division of tasks between the factory and home. The advantages for the industry are substantial. It escapes unions that not only tend to raise wages but restrict managers' control over the reassignment of workers to different tasks. It also enjoys a substantial reduction in a company's payroll and, as a result, significant savings in retirement, Social Security, health and other benefit contributions. Overall, the industry enjoys a reduction in the costs of production for those tasks that are in the most competitive branches, those involving the unskilled or semi-skilled production of standardized parts.

In the electronics industry, circuit board assembly (which is categorized as electronics and electrical equipment assembly) is the primary set of tasks shipped out for outwork activities. This type of activity has apparently reached an extensive degree in California, where a State Commission has been created to investigate its operations. Southeast Asian refugees have become involved in these outwork jobs. Of course, little documentation is available to

demonstrate the extent of this involvement. Still, journalistic investigations have repeatedly turned up refugees among the assemblers working for cash in their home or in "garage shops".

An investigation by the San Jose Mercury News, in the heart of California's Silicon Valley, reported the following:

> "Beneath the Silicon Valley is an underground of cheap labor in which housewives, aliens, refugees, welfare recipients and others struggling to make ends meet earn less than the minimum wage and do without Social Security and workers' compensation benefits...
>
> for others - aliens, refugees on assistance and welfare recipients happy for any extra income that does not come to the government's attention - piece rate pay drops below the minimum wage."

The Mercury News reported the following examples of these practices:

- "A San Jose broker for black market work who charges Indochinese refugees $150 to $250 for jobs as home assemblers."
- "a Laotian refugee looking for unreported income while collecting welfare was told by a black-market middleman he would have to pay a $250 entry fee for 'basic materials' and even then would have to meet certain skill qualifications to receive assignment."
- "A South County businessman says that two Indochinese refugee families living with him asked if they could set up a circuit-board assembly line in his home while they continued to collect welfare. He was offered help in his business if he did."

Finally, the News records the view of one corporate source that summarizes the entire practice. "Silicon Valley," it reports, "developed a labor black market 'like San Francisco and Chinatown. A lot of clothing is still produced there by almost slave labor, but a lot of non-English speaking persons need the work.'"

By its very nature, involvement in the underground economy is not

the major feature of refugees' employment experiences. Indeed, only a small minority are in a position to take advantage of such opportunities even if they exist. The above revelations, however, serve as a necessary reminder of the complexity of the refugees' employment experiences and the difficulties in trying to summarize either their status or primary means of "getting ahead" in the United States.

VIII. Concluding Remarks

The persistent reader who has faithfully followed the discussion throughout this report will undoubtedly welcome a brief concluding section. In general, two observations summarize the analyses presented here. First, despite methodological problems and diverse research designs, there is general agreement that Southeast Asian refugees have overall lower levels of labor force participation and employment than the U.S. population in the same age and gender groups. The 1975 arrivals appear to have made substantial progress toward comparable levels, but the evidence is generally weak as to whether the other cohorts of arrivals have done or will do as well. Even the earliest arrivals, however, still face the vagaries of the periodic downswings in the U.S. economy with much less security than the total U.S. workforce. In each of these features, the Southeast Asian refugee population appears to have occupied a position in the U.S. labor market comparable to other ethnic minorities and recent immigrant groups. To the extent this is the case, we should find them increasingly facing problems more characteristic of these other groups than those created solely by a specific connection to the resettlement

effort.

The Southeast Asian population is itself an extremely heterogeneous population and its progress in the U.S. economy should take diverse paths. In general, however, the nature of the incorporation of the refugee population into the U.S. labor market has a twofold character. First, many of the connections that workers make in the marketplace appear to be similar for both the refugees and the U.S. population. We do not observe unexpected relationships, for example, among the individual demographic and social characteristics of the refugees and their probability of being employed or searching for work. Of course, some of these expected relationships are disturbing; for example, the persistent inequality between men and women. But these unequal relationships belong to the general nature of the U.S. labor market. We probably should not expect the refugees to overcome these broader structural problems. Finally, contrary to some arguments, refugees also enter the labor market through generally anticipated channels. They make their market connections through private contacts and they find employment in the private sector.

Second, the refugees also face situations that are unique to their experiences and the refugee resettlement program. As should be expected, but is often ignored, private resttlement and sponsorship resources appear to be a source of differentiation -- and perhaps inequality -- in the refugees' early economic progress. The form of sponsorship, as a measure of the differential private resources made directly available to refugees, shows signs of contributing to different conditions.

There are also ethnic and geographical sources of differentiation within the refugee population. The category of "Southeast Asian" is very much a misnomer when it comes to understanding the experiences of these people. It should remind us of the popular, but ill-conceived, use of "Hispanic" as an analytical concept. The Hispanic population, especially in economic terms, is so heterogeneous that few commonalities exist. It lumps together indiscriminately such different groups as Mexican-Americans, Cuban refugees, and Puerto Rican mainlanders. Similar, the Southeast Asian population is only a single group in terms of the administration of the refugee program. Of course, such an administrative view has its purposes. But it also obscures the experiences, mechanisms, and problems encountered or used by the refugees. There are labor market processes that control all refugees in similar ways, and these call for a broad, generalized type of response. The pervasive influences of background education, gender or household size are examples. But there are also distinguishable experiences of each ethnic group that require separate recognition.

In sum, an appreciation of the work-related activities of the Southeast Asian refugees requires consideration of both the magnitude of their conditions and the relationships in which they are involved. In both counts, the refugees resemble primarily a working poor population. Most are dependent on wage work for their subsistence, but the type of employment they find is only marginally above poverty levels. They face disadvantages in terms of background training and occupational skills that prevent rapid progress. And, except for a few subgroups, they do not have access to private resources to

catapult them -- as a group -- into better jobs and more secure positions. They respond in characteristic ways, pooling income from a variety of household workers, intensifying their search for employment, and utilizing public assistance whenever available.

The issue of public assistance brings us full circle to the topics raised at the very beginning of this report. In that introduction, I described briefly the tendency of some observers to view the use of public assistance independently of the refugees' employment situation. Indeed, employment is often discussed only in terms of concerns over the higher assistance utilization rate. Refugees, it is charged, develop a welfare mentality that inhibits their search for employment. This theme was echoed in the conventional wisdom discussed throughout the report.

The prejudicial conclusions drawn from such perspectives are largely without support. Refugees do not lose their motivation to work; indeed, every study reviewed identifies real barriers to labor force participation and employment. Reasons for not seeking work, for example, seldom include even the frustrations of not being able to find work. And rarely do refugees indicate they do not want to work. The statistical analyses in this report add that refugees are succumbing to the same processes of labor market exchange which guide U.S. workers, and are facing hardships similar to other ethnic minorities.

The problem facing analysts and policymakers is to disentangle the complex realities confronted by the working poor, where work and assistance payments are frequently interchangeable depending upon

marginal changes in circumstances (e.g., downturns in the economy, availability of classroom training, an additional member coming or leaving the household, etc.). Imputing motivations and mentalities to such groups represent ill-conceived, biased charges designed more to place blame than to understand the social and economic mechanisms at work. The problem of developing accurate, useful perceptions, however, remains difficult. For example, Pullen and Ryan offer the following two observations on the same page of their report:

> (1) "It is interesting that these groups (defined by combinations of earned income and assistance) do not show significant differences in the income remaining after expenses for rent, utilities and transportation have been deducted and adjusted for the number in the family. This reflects the income leveling effects of public assistance payments. It would also appear that there is little financial incentive to change from one group to another" (e.g., mixed earned and transfer income to all earned income).

This observation would appear to support those who seek to find welfare motivations among those on assistance. But if we begin with a recognition of the primacy of work, and only the subsidiary role of assistance, a more valuable explanation is possible. Pullen and Ryan observe the following:

> (2) "The intermediate group whose welfare payments are a supplement to their earnings have the largest households, the greater expenses and the least <u>per capita</u> income....This pattern of differences, where almost 50 percent of those households receiving income from wages require additional supplements from public assistance leads to the conclusion that the <u>jobs</u> refugees get do not generally provide adequate income to support them."

The problems faced by Southeast Asian refugees, like those faced

by other immigrants and minorities, have their roots in the nature of the connections to the labor market and their conditions of employment, not in popularized preferences or mentalities to remain on public assistance. The level of public assistance utilization will decline when the refugees' employment situation improves, not the reverse. To cut assistance indiscriminately as a way to motivate employment may simply intensify the hardships refugees already face in the labor market.

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